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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether a change in focus, viewing student writing as a process rather than a product, would have a significant positive effect on writing skill development. Secondarily, the study examined the effectiveness of actual teaching techniques, including a series of writing tasks interspersed with student-teacher interaction and the use of comments. Subjects were two pre-intermediate level groups, each with 20 students of English as a Second Language. The writing of one group was evaluated using traditional error correction, and the work of the other using a process approach. Teacher comments and students' final essays were evaluated. Five basic kinds of comments were found concerning: (1) organization and content; (2) lack of cohension; (3) giving details; (4) use of the native language; and (5) offering encouragement. Areas of writing improvement noted include the following: overall improvement; better expression of content; improved cohesion and grammar; and improvement over a series of tasks. Results suggest that the process approach was more effective than traditional error correction. It is also concluded that while the process approach helped improve student writing, it also contributed to individual student development. (MSE)

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RESPONDING TO STUDENTS' WRITING

A PILOT STUDY

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1 - INTRODUCTION

The present study is a consequence of a decisive change in emphasis and attitude as regards the teaching/learning of writing which has been occurring at the Sociedade Brasileira de Cultura Inglesa-Rio de Janeiro (henceforth SBCI-Rio) ever since Ann Raimes's ideas[4] started circulating among its staff. The emphasis on the process of writing, and therefore on a different way of responding to students' composing activities,has gradually been replacing straightforward correction of the final product. Both on the Teacher Training Courses and at in-service meetings,seminars and workshops the SBCI-Rio teaching staff have been exposed to this approach which has been so effectively revisited by Raimes.

However,no step had been taken towards an actual verification of the efficacy or feasibility of the use of the approach in the classroom. This pilot study is,therefore, a first attempt for us to try and gain insight from such an inspection which, we hope, will trigger off a more exhaustive research programme in the future.

1.1 - Aims

As was mentioned above, the main aim of the study in question is that of verifying to what extent the change in focus, that is, viewing and treating students' writing as a continuous process rather than a finished product to be assessed, would really add improvements as regards the development of their writing skills. In other words, is the process approach <u>really</u> a more effective method? If so, in what sense?

As a secondary aim, we thought we would also like to investigate some of the actual teaching techniques that go along with the process approach: the treatment of the <u>process line</u>[2] and, especially, the writing of comments which seem to be the core of the approach as far as techniques are concerned. Parallel with this secondary aim, feedback from the students would have to be collected as corroborative support to the effectiveness of the methodology under discussion.

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1.2 - Methodology of research

Our first concern when working out a set of methodological proceoures for our study was that of choosing an adequate level. We came to the conclusion that our pre-intermediate students would make the most appropriate subjects since, firstly, at this level they would already have covered most of the basic course having been exposed to the basic structural/functional/notional network of the English language and, secondly, in terms of writing they would have covered the basic aspects of the skill. That is to say, the fundamentals at both sentential and discoursal levels[3] would have been dealt with. Also, it is at the pre-intermediate level that all this linguistic/extra-linguistic background is to be retrieved and extended a step further towards more challenging and demanding tasks. Thus, not only would more solid data be available to us, but we would also have the chance of working with subjects whose work would be more likely to reveal the effects the process approach would have upon them since they would still be, at this stage, free from any other kind of influence the exposure to other approaches could have on their writing.

Next, we were faced with the choice of conducting either a quantitative or qualitative study. The latter seemed to be the more appropriate insofar as our aim was that of looking into the techniques of the approach as well and, for this, we would need to add more depth to the analysis.

In addition, in order to carry out a quantitative study, more precise research methods[4] would have to be employed for a greater length of time if it were to yield meaningful results. This would not only involve an operation our situation then did not allow for, but also lead us off one of our main tracks which was that of simply taking the first steps towards developing a more extensive programme in years to come.

1.2.1 - The choice of subjects

We decided to work with two pre-intermediate level groups of 20 students each with similar linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds. The experimental group made use of the process approach along the lines described in 1.2.2 below. The control group was treated in the 'traditional' way, namely, straightforward correction without any special concern for criteria (whether emphasis would be placed on sentential or discoural elements, for instance) was used and no revisions required of the subjects; an evaluative mark was given for their first and only draft.

It must be stressed at this point that although some evidence of the effectiveness of the process approach will be drawn from a comparison of the work of the two groups, it should only be taken as additional support for the qualitative analysis of the experimental groups's production. As was mentioned earlier, a comprehensive study by means of comparing and contrasting students' work or results would involve a great number of variables and, therefore, require specific research methods and conditions that are beyond the scope of the present study. The control group was used only as a kind of 'internal' parameter.

1.2.2 - The use of the process approach

Based on Raimes's (1983: 140-141) process line[5], we developed a chain that would fit the constraints of the SBCI -Rio setting:

1. teacher selects topic
2. students engage in pre-writing activities (either provided by the SBCI Department of Education to supplement coursebook materials or by the class teacher himself)
3. teacher reads notes,lists, outlines produced as a result of pre-writing activities, makes comments
4. students write draft 1
5. teacher (or students - peer correction) reads and makes comments/suggestions
6. students write draft 2
7. teacher reads and evaluates

Having led the experimental group through the first six steps, the class teacher then evaluated the students' work to be kept for further analysis. Whenever certain problems persisted, 'individual conferences' were held as an eighth step.

As for the control group, only steps 1 and 2 were used. The students were then asked to write their final versions and hand them in for correction and evaluation.

1.3 - Presentation of study results

Having gone through these preliminary notes on the aims and methodological procedures of the study in question, we shall now go on to present a set of illustrative samples of the kinds of comments made and to account for the reasons why they were made in such ways. Then we shall list the areas in which the experimental group made progress and illustrate them with the various versions the students produced during the process of writing.

In a third section we shall make additional comments on both groups that will possibly help us in our appreciation of the process approach.

2 - RESPONSES

When one talks about the process approach, one is, above all, talking about specific attitudes in terms of a definition of writing; that is to say, writing is seen as an ongoing process that can be perfected as the writer 'struggles' along throughout his/her creative undertaking.

It might sound rather odd that the adjective creative has been chosen to describe the skill under consideration as we are obviously referring to non-literary production. Well, it seems to us that the production of any piece of written discourse, however academic it may be, involves a great deal of choice and combination on the writer's part.

From our point of view, a great amount of what is put down on paper does not depend on our fancy alone, but, rather, is based upon a whole set of fixed rules and conventions as well. These rules and conventions must be followed if we are to write intelligibly and, thus, put a given message across to our readers; and, if this applies even to the most ingenious and daring literary texts, let alone to the kind of writing foreign students, aiming at communicative competence, are supposed to produce. It is this set of fixed rules and conventions, both at sentential and supra-sentential levels, that can and must be given priority in our teaching. Creativity, as we understand it, seems to come in through the ability one develops in choosing and combining (and sometimes breaking) these fixed rules to produce a whole which, due to a number of intrinsic traits, is then identified as written text.

It goes without saying, however, that the development of students' creative skills must be encouraged, but certainly not before our foreign language learner has mastered the less creative part of the process of writing. It is here that the process approach seems to come in. In agreeing that we should give priority to the conventional aspects of writing, we do not mean that creativity should be inhibited.

By responding to our students' writing in the 'traditional' way, we not only fail to reach the discoursal level, but, more often than not, fail to help them as far as writing is concerned in any explicit or effective way The results are invariably frustration and inhibition on the students' part. If, however, our attitude is that of fostering in the learner the awareness that writing is both a conventional and creative process, we must go in for a method of 'correction' which will both lead our pupil to learn/acquire[6] the necessary rules and conventions and exercise/develop his /her creative skills.

The conventional elements inherent in the writing process can be learnt over a series of revisions and draft writing, and creativity, in its turn, fostered through the choice and combination of these very elements according to the learner's aims,audience and fancy. In short, as a routine, teachers should teach writing without overlooking this ever-present element of creativity in their learners' production.

It was based on this reasoning that we decided to work along the lines of the following basic principles outlined by Raimes (1983: 142-143):

1. When you pick up a student's piece of writing, don't immediately reach for a pen or pencil. Read the whole piece through first before you write anything.
2. Look for strengths as well as weaknesses, and let the student know what the strengths are.
3. If you use any editing symbols (sp., cap., etc.), make sure that the students are familiar with all of them and know what to do when they see one. Provide opportunities for the students to use the symbols, too.
4. Work out your own strategy for handling errors and explain it to your students. Decide if you will correct errors or simply indicate where they occur, if you will deal only with the errors you have discussed in class, with errors of a certain type, or with all errors; and, again, let your students know.
5. Remember that when you or any other reader responds to a student's piece of writing, your main job is not to pass judgement on its quality (unless you are an examiner and not a teacher), but to help the writer see what to do next. Ask yourself: What should the writer do now to improve this paper? What does this paper need most?

In making our comments, firstly we prioritized the conventional aspects of writing; secondly, we decided to work from discourse down to language problems and, thirdly, to respect and praise whatever legitimate steps the learner took towards creativity.

In the course of the study we identified the need for five basic kinds of comments or responses which will be discussed and exemplified as follows.

2.1 - Problems of organisation and content

As was explained above, one of our priorities was organisation of ideas and content (coherence). Whenever serious problems in these areas were spotted, we limited our comments to them, usually disregarding all others.

Examples:

(1) (A letter to the Mayor of their own city presenting their ideas, reasons and arguments under the headings: sport and recreation, culture and entertainment and environment, so as to have the city council change their policies as regards these facilities.)

1) *19 Mage Street*
Sta. Rosa - Niteroi

Dear Mayor.

In my opinion you have to better the good bus services because it's very bad. I think the cinema is important to the people, but more commons is more. And to finally, I think the library is more important to the art gallery.

Your friendally

COMMENTS: Your letter is not well organised. Follow the outline proposed and discussed in class. There should be more than just one paragraph. 1) Brazilian addresses should be written in Portuguese. What about the date?

(2) (Pre-writing activities: students view snippet on Agatha: her husband tells her he is in love with his secretary and asks for a divorce. Agatha is upset, leaves home after writing a letter. After having gone through a series of viewing comprehension activities, students plan and write an outline for the letter Agatha writes.)

Tuesday, 22nd October, 19886

Dear Archibald:

In the last days, our lifes wasn't be good for me and for you. We discussed every time and your attitude in me was not friendly. I'm not satisfect with this situation, it's impossible to live with a man who pretend all the time that he loves someone what isn't true.

I think you love someone who isn't me, but I think you need not pretend all this time, if you fell me you love other person when we married, well, I gave you a divorce (A) and it was ok for some people wasn't it? But you deceive me all this years.

I'm writing this letter to say you I'm upset with all this and I don't want to see you never more in my life, I don't give you a divorce (A) because you don't need, I suppose, at this last time, you already get married to your attractive secretary. (B)

I'm leaving this home forever. I'm not come back. I'll go to a hotel or rent a house in other city, don't look for me, I'm not look for you.

Agatha

COMMENTS:

Let's work on content first.

A) Are you divorced?
B) How can a married man get married?

Come and talk to me after class.

2.2 - Lack of cohesion

Next, we looked for problems as concerns cohesion for this area seems to be intermediate between discourse and sentence in the sense that it can affect both levels if not dealt with in an appropriate way. We particularly stressed the use of transitional phrases without overlooking substitution, reference and repetition.

Example:

(3) (Students were asked to write about a famous sportsman)

Airton Senna was born on 26th of September 1960 and (1) he studied at Sao Jose in Sao Paulo. (1) He used to watch TV.

Today he gets up early to go to work and afterward he goes to pub with his friend to talk about competition.

(1) His plan for the future are hope win the competition and get married.

COMMENTS:

-------,

The organisation of your article is coherent but I think some of the sentences (1) should be linked more appropriately - (you should use linkers; e.g. 'when he was a child', 'in future'.etc.)

2.3 - Detailed comments

Only when the learner presented no or few problems in the above mentioned areas (discoursal/discoursal-sentential levels) did we proceed to tackle those found at the sentential level proper, gauging the depth of our comments according to his/her needs as well as readiness for intake.

Example:

(4) *Isabel is a famous sportswoman who was born on the 18th* (4) *of September 1955 in Sao Paulo. She used to study at Mackenzie School and she also used to play volleyball at school.*

She (1) *actually* (2) *play volleyball in rio, she has a contract with Supergasbras, a very good team but now she is playing for* (5) *Brazilian team on the world championship.*

She wants to be specialize (2) *in fisical* (3) *education and she also wants to have lots of babies.*

COMMENTS:

Very good article. You write well. Now, I think you should concentrate on the following details:
1) check the meaning of 'actually'
2) verb form
3) spelling
4) that's how we speak
5) check the use of the definite article

2.4 - Comments in L1

L1 was used whenever the learner presented a mixed pattern of errors either at the discoursal or sentential level. This kind of comment was resorted to especially if it was felt that a particular learner needed more solid guidelines for problems that went beyond the domain of writing as such.

The example that follows illustrates the learner's need for help in the area of study skills so as to enable her to overcome problems at the sentential level that seemed to be deeply rooted, if not fossilized.

Example:

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(5)

Dom Bosco 116
Vital Brazil
Niteroi - RJ

7 of October 1986

Dear Mary

I'm write to you because I intend spend a days with you.
I terribly upset my husband asked me for a divorce. He says, he don't like me, he likes Miss Neal his secretary and he hopes married with she.
I've think interrup the planes of my husband .If I desappear He can't get married with Miss Neal now.
Mary I'd stay at there in the saturday and I speak to you more informations about everythink.

Love, Agatha

COMMENTS:

_____Acho que a organizacao da sua carta esta boa: Proposito da carta/Problema/Seus planos. Prem, o ingles nao esta nada bom. Creio que muito se deve a falta de cuidado. Voce precisa verificar o que nao souber ou nao tiver certeza. Por exemplo, como se escreve datas em ingles - cheque nas suas notas ou do Pre IB ou de qualquer outro curso. Use o livro para obter modelos. Outra coisa, os tempos e as formas verbais: por exemplo, "I'm write" - voce ja cometeu esse mesmo erro antes. Por que nao checar as outras cartas? Algumas frases nao contem verbos - isto e possivel em ingles nesta situacao?

Escreva uma outra carta usando a mesma organizacao mas sem olhar para esta. Consulte suas notas, seus cadernos, outras cartas, seus livros e a folha sobre "Agatha". Entregue-me ambas as cartas na proxima aula.

P.S. Cheque cada tempo verbal antes de escrever,ok?

(Translation of comments:In terms of organisation your letter is not bad: aim/problem/plans. However, you're having problems with the language. I think you did not pay much attention to it. You must check everything that you do not know or that you are not sure of.For instance, how does one write dates in English? Look up your notes, the Pre-IB booklet or any other one. Use your coursebook for reference-look up the 'model' letters. Another thing you must pay attention to:verb tenses and verb forms.For example,"I'm write" - you have made this mistake before.How about checking your previous letters? Some of your sentences have no verbs - is this possible in this particular situation?

Write another letter using the same organisation but do not look at this one.Check your class notes,other letters, your coursebook and the exercise-sheet on "Agatha".Please hand in both letters next class.

P.S. Do not forget to check each verb tense before writing it down,ok?)

2.5 - Encouragement

One of the postulates of the process approach is that emphasis should also be placed on the strengths of the learner's production. Therefore, in addition to general encouraging comments nearly always made notwithstanding the kind of response given by the teacher, specific encouragement was provided whenever the learner demonstrated initiative especially as regards legitimate creative choice/combination.

Example:

(6) *Ayrton Senna is a famous Formula One pilot who gets up early to go to work and afterwards goes to a pub with her friends to talk about competitions.*

He was born on 26th of September in 1960 and studied at Sao Jose School, a famous school in Sao Paulo. Everyday in his early life, he used to watch TV, but now, it's a dream because he's a busy pilot.

For the future (1),*Ayrton Senna hope win* (2) *all the competitions on the world championship and from here three years* (3), *he will get married.*

COMMENTS:

I think the organisation of your article is very good. I especially liked the use of part c of your outline as an introductory paragraph. This seems to make a lot of sense - you attract the reader's attention.

Now, please, check the following:

1) preposition
2) verb form
3) inappropriate construction;can you try saying it in a different way?

3 - AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

After a careful analysis of the data collected over the semester, we noticed that learners going through the process line made progress in various areas which very often went beyond the nature of the comments made. These areas will be specified for procedural purposes and illustrated as follows.

3.1 - Overall improvement

One of the positive effects noticed was that so very often learners improved aspects at the sentential level even when comments were made aiming at problems in coherence and content.

Example:

(7) (For first draft see example (1))

Second draft:

(2) *24th September*

Mage 19
Pe Pequeno
Sta.Rosa

Dear Mayor.

The sports catered in Rio, I think are football and volleyball. In school, they used theres and basketball and handball. I think they have used swimming pool too, because (1) *it's must important for a peoples who have problems with health.*

The traffical services are too old and dirty. I think you clean better but I think the soluation are change everything.

(3) *Your friend,*

COMMENTS:

This letter is better than the first one, but I think it still needs improvement. For example:
1) Why do you mention Rio if you're writing to the Mayor of Niteroi? It doesn't seem clear why you wrote this paragraph - what do you expect the Mayor to do?
2) That's not where you should write the date
3) Inappropriate ending - check your book
P.S. Check your class notes and outline again.

Third draft:

Mage 19 - Sta. Rosa
Niteroi - RJ
24,September 1986.

Dear Mayor,

I think you should encourage the sports in Niteroi, because they are very important for the people's health.

Here we practise only some sports such as volleyball and football, but I think the swimming is the most complete one. So, I ask you for introduce this.

The bus services are too old and dirty. I think you could clean them but perhaps the solution is change everything.

Congratulation

As is clear from the example above, in going through the process line this particular learner felt it was necessary to change and improve several areas other than those comments had been made on. This seems to be one of the great advantages of the approach: learners gradually become aware of their own problems and, thus, they themselves seek solutions to express their thoughts more appropriately rather than to rely entirely on the teacher. This is undoubtedly an invaluable learning tool for, among a number of other benefits to the learner, the teacher is contributing to the development of learner independence by fostering initiative.

3.2 - Improvement in expressing content

Students' written production can sometimes be loaded with 'errors' as a result of their not having much to say about a given topic which is either assigned 'out of the blue' or merely thematically linked to a unit in the coursebook. Although the latter possibility seems to be the more appropriate in terms of adequacy of methodology, it has been proven ineffective with average students who, generally, constitute the greater part of the class.

By the teacher's using step 2 of the process line, this problem can definitely be minimized. Students' awareness of the need for planning leads them to more organised and meaningful writing in terms of content; now they have more precise information to pass on to their readers.

In spite of the pre-writing activities, problems, however, did occur and the approach seemed to have been helpful here too.

Example:

(8) (For the first draft see example (2))

Second draft:

Thursday, 30th of October, 1985

Dear Archibald,

Bad things was happening in our lifes. I think you love someone who is not me. I'm trying to understand this situation and I think you are not guilty.

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OK, I'd give you a divorce but I'll leave this house for ever. I'm not go back and I'll go to a hotel or I'll rent a house in another city.

So it'd be good for you, you could be alone and you could live with your secretary.

Now I'll stop here. Don't look for me, I'm not look for you never more, good luck with your new life.

Agatha

3.3 - Improvement as regards cohesion and grammar

Examples:

A. Cohesion:

(9) (1) *Her name is Ayrton Senna, he was born on 26th of September in 1960. He studied at Sao Jose school and he used to watch TV in your free time.*

(2) *He gets up to go to work and afterwards he goes to pub with his friends and they talk about competitions.*

He hopes win the competition and gets married are his plans for the future.(1)

COMMENTS:

I think basically you have to work on 'transition', that is, how you link (put together) your ideas. For example:
(1) try and re-arrange these constructions which are awkward
(2) here try and find an appropriate linker

Second draft:

Ayrton Senna was born on 26th of September in 1960. He studied at Sao Jose School and he used to watch TV in his free time.

Now he gets up to go to work and afterwards he goes to the puo with his friends and they talk about competition.

His plans for the future are he hopes win the competition and get married.

B. Grammar:

(10) (For first draft see example (4))

Second draft:

Isabel is a famous sportswoman who was born on September 18th, 1955, in Sao Paulo. She used to study at Mackenzie School and she also used to play voleeyball at school.

She plays volleyball in Rio, she has a contract with Supergasbras, a very good team, but now she is playing with the Brazilian team on the world championship.

She wants to specialize in pyisical education and she also wants to have lots of babies.

3.4 - Improvement over a series of tasks

Finally, we would like to stress that improvement was also felt from task to task. As an example, we are transcribing below a learner's first and last compositions. This last piece shows improvement in cohesion specifically and, as a whole, reveals much more language and discourse awareness.

Example:

(11) *On January I went to many places. I went to my farm in Itaborai, I went to Campos, I went to Araruama, I went to Brasilia, and I went to many other places. In my family only my sister, my father, my mother, my grandfather and my grand mother traveled, I don't know why? but I think they don't like travel.*

On July my family and I went to Paraguai, we left Niteroi on 13 of July, and first stayed at a little town, and on the day after we continued the travel, two days after we arrived Foz do Iguacu, we saw the Cataratas do Iguacu. Well this was the best travel which I did.

(12) *Last week at night on a farm in Alabama an unidentified flying object took five creatures. They were green, short and had only one eye. When the farmer saw the flying object he went to his house and took a gun. But when he got out a green light took him to the flying object.*

One of the creatures took him and puted him in a cold room for twenty minutes after that another creature puted him in a hot room for twenty minutes too and then they puted him in a room, this room had a black chair and many machines. They puted him on the chair and gave him a thing to drink then he slept.

When he standed up, he was at his house on his bedroom. The creatures took him to studied.

The farmer never more went out his house at night because he was very nervose.

4- ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

At this stage we would like to make a few comments on two basic areas - those of students' results and students' response to the approach - involving both the experimental and the control groups. Once again we wish to stress that it is not our endeavour to present a detailed comparison of the two groups as, we believe, this would be the task of a much more extensive research programme. The following notes aim at adding supplementary information for an appreciation of the process approach.

4.1 - Students' results

We thought we should start by reporting on the course results as a whole. Naturally, these results cannot and should not be accounted for in terms of the process approach only; this would be too naive an attitude for students' achievement is related to a whole gamut of variables. Nevertheless, as we intend to demonstrate below, the process approach seems to have played a part, however minimal, in the relative success achieved with the experimental group.

The assessment system then used at the SBCI-Rio comprised two basic components: 2 exams - mid-term and end-of-term - which evaluated all four skills plus a coursework assessment component that included extensive reading, writing, speaking and participation (attendance and homework included). To be promoted a student would have to pass in each component plus an interview with a minimum of 50% of the total number of marks in addition to reaching an overall pass mark of 60%.

As can be seen from this brief sketch, the learner was assessed for writing from various angles in both components and, therefore, its weighting seems to be quite significant.

At the end of the semester it was verified that the number of failures in the control group was 50% higher.

Another aspect of students' results to be considered in our study seems to be the comparison of the marks awarded for the students' written work throughout the course as part of the coursework assessment component.

The tables below are a sample of the marks awarded to 12 students, 6 from the control group and 6 from the experimental group. Four compositions (C-1-4) have been chosen at random, but following a chronological sequence, to be contrasted with the final test mark for writing (FT) - all the exam compositions were graded out of 5 by an external examiner. The subjects chosen were all average or slightly below-average students.

CONTROL GROUP

S1	4.1	3.0	2.0	1.6	2.6	0.75
S2	4.1	3.0	2.5	2.5	3.0	2.0
S3	3.8	4.1	3.0	2.5	3.3	1.5
S4	3.3	4.1	3.0	3.3	3.4	0.3
S5	3.8	3.3	2.5	4.1	3.4	3.8
S6	3.8	4.3	4.0	3.0	3.7	2.0
	C1	C2	C3	C4	AVERAGE	FT

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

S1	2.6	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.9	3.5
S2	3.0	4.1	3.5	2.0	3.1	4.0
S3	3.3	4.1	3.5	2.5	3.3	2.6
S4	2.8	2.5	2.0	1.6	2.2	2.5
S5	---	4.1	3.0	4.1	3.7	2.5
S6	1.6	3.0	2.5	4.1	2.8	2.0
	C1	C2	C3	C4	AVERAGE	FT

A thorough analysis of the data above would naturally involve a number of issues that lie beyond the scope of the present report: for instance, the reliability of the marking in as much as subjectivity is concerned; the fact that the task used as a parameter was produced under different conditions from the others - it was an exam question and as such was affected by time constraints, was likely to be affected by anxiety, did not go through the process line, nor was it preceded by any pre-writing activities. Also, the relative degree of proficiency of the subjects involved was not taken into account.

However, even if one disregards all these variables and others not mentioned here, the analysis can still yield valuable conclusions for our purpose. If one compares the average mark with the exam mark, one realises that in the control group all but one subject, who remained stable, scored less in the exam whereas in the experimental group 2 scored more, 3 less and 2 remained

stable. In addition, the marks awarded to the experimental group subjects tended to present a more systematic pattern as concerns improvement than the control group - clear evidence, so it seems to us, of the consistency of progress with the experimental group.

4.2 - Students' response to the approach

The second and last area to be reported on involves observations on the students' response to the approach. A feedback session in L1 was held with the experimental group halfway through the semester and notes were also made by the class teacher as regards learners' attitude and motivation all through the course.

4.2.1 - Feedback collected

During the feedback session the experimental group unanimously declared that "they were enjoying the approach and were learning more". They were also curious to find out how the comments were made, that is, what criteria the teacher used when responding to their writing for in comparing their comments, they had observed that the treatment given to the same problem varied from student to student.

4.2.2 - Students' attitude and motivation patterns

The learners in the experimental group showed a higher degree of initiative and learner independence than those in the control group. The degree of motivation increased gradually as they became more familiar with the approach and realised that their learning depended a lot on their own initiative. This pattern became more clearly evident especiallly after the feedback session. As a result, the students in the experimental group started using the library and self-access facilities more often and by the end of the course they had read 28.8% more books than the students in the control group.

As for attitude, it was felt that the amount of L1 in the class decreased considerably - it was very rarely used even by those students who at first seemed reluctant to use only L2 in class. With the best students, L2 became the language of interaction with the teacher even outside the classroom. The students, in general, were at ease and thus ready to learn; the atmosphere in class became more and more relaxed as the work went on.

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As for the control group, although the atmosphere in class was relaxed enough, problems as regards attitude towards L2, class management and the learning process/methodology remained unresolved: they failed to do their homework much more often, the amount of L1 used in class remained the same throughout the course, little initiative or enthusiasm for learning L2 was felt.

Once again it must be stressed that correlating these facts with the use of the process approach would be a hasty and naive conclusion for, without doubt, lots of other variables would have to be analysed before such a conclusion could be drawn. However, as was suggested earlier, the process approach played a decisive part in determining these patterns since it was the most evident variable found in the methodological/managerial treatment given to both groups.

5 - CONCLUSION

After having presented this brief appreciation of the process approach, we will go on to make a few suggestions concerning areas that deserve further investigation.

It is our belief that the techniques for responding to students' written work could still be perfected. An interesting starting point would be to list and grade for priority and difficulty the various elements, both at sentential and discoursal levels, on which comments should be made. A listing of structural/functional items per level of instruction to be acquired would be particularly welcome. The researcher would then go on to find out to what extent language problems would decrease if teachers could count on a more systematic framework for comments to be made at the sentential level.

Another possibility would be that of conducting a thorough research programme that would compare students' achievement over a long period of time, not only to find out the extent to which the process approach is a more or a less effective method than the traditional one - which is still widely used - but also to try and correlate its possible effectiveness with social and psychological variables that affect language learning/acquisition.

In conclusion, we must say that throughout the present pilot study it was felt that, besides the positive effects of the process approach reported in sections 3 and 4, a much more insightful conclusion was that the approach seems to lend itself to the development of the learner as a 'whole person', as an individual who has the right to have his/her 'creative work' respected. The learner and his/her work are seen from a more humanistic angle and the role of the teacher is that of suggesting possibilities as regards his/her global development, the ultimate responsibility of which is in the learner's hands.

Another role ascribed to the teacher using the process approach is that of fostering the awareness that developing one's writing skills must not be taken as an undertaking in isolation.

The approach in question lends itself to drawing from other areas of language learning and, thus, generates such an amount of positive development that these other areas will be enriched as well.

The process approach must then be regarded as a process that goes together with the learner's linguistic, social and psychological maturation.

6 - NOTES

1) The study subsequently described is based on Ann Raimes' Techniques in Teaching Writing, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, although we must not fail to acknowledge our indebtedness to many other colleagues working in the same field.

2) See section 1.2.2

3) The terms 'sentential' and 'discoursal' have been adopted to refer to two linguistic/extralinguistc levels of language analysis because we believe they are broad enough for our purposes. By this we mean that we tried to avoid terminology that by being open to different interpretations could encourage ambiguity (such as coherence whose place in terms of level of analysis is still open to discussion). In our study the terms in question merely imply that one can find elements of both formal and functional/ sociolinguistic nature in the process of writing.

4) We would like to stress that for a quantitative analysis to achieve a certain degree of success we would need to develop a number of research methods that could at least count on the following favarouable conditions: more freedom as regards the implementation of the syllabus so that more classroom time could be devoted to writing and having the same subjects available over a longer period of time (at least one more semester), which would not be atainable due to institutional constraints.

5) Although Raimes's process line involves a much longer and more comprehensive chain, we had to adapt it to the constraints of our situation even at the expense of de-emphasizing the process. Basically, our constraints were those of time, syllabus to be covered and the need for assessment aiming at promoting students to a higher level of instruction at the end of the term.

6) It must be mentioned that the dichotomy 'learning/acquisiton', however adequate it may be, will not be taken into account in our study. The terms are, therefore, used interchangeably in this paper.

7 - ABSTRACT

Our main concern with the present paper is that of reporting on the conclusions of a pilot study carried out among SBCI students at pre-intermediate level aiming at finding out how effective the process approach may be for the teaching of writing to foreign students of English.

The method used in the study was that of comparing and contrasting qualitatively the production of two groups of students, to one of whom the process approach was applied, over a period of one school term. Both the experimental and the control groups were composed of students with very similar language and cultural backgrounds. All the subjects had gone through the same number of teaching hours at the SBCI (about 250 hours of tuition).

As far as the approach itself is concerned, it was decided that the class teacher would use the ideas postulated by Ann Raimes in her Techniques in Teaching Writing (1983) slightly adapted to meet the needs of our teaching situation at the Sociedade Brasileira de Cultura Inglesa - Rio de Janeiro.

Mention must be made that by no means did we intend to conduct an extensive programme of research in order to draw final conclusions on the methodology, but, rather, by analysing the data collected, try to find evidence for the (in)adequacy of the approach as a tool for developing the learner's writing ability. Concomitantly, we hoped to look into a few specific techniques that go along with the methodology.

On the whole, it seems that the process approach is an effective method of helping the foreign learner to develop his/her ability in writing and in other areas of language learning as well. By regarding writing as a product and not as a finished product to be assessed, the learner realises that learning a language is not a passive enterprise, but, instead, an ongoing process that requires a great deal of initiative on his/her part; the EFL student, thus, realises that there is a whole universe before him/her to be explored.